

STEPHEN STONE - STATEMENT FOR HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Chairman Conyers, Ranking Member Smith and Members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Stephen Lane Stone. I have worked for Transocean since February of 2008 as a roustabout, which is a general laborer on an oil rig. I was on board Transocean's *Deepwater Horizon* rig on the night it exploded, killing 11 of my fellow crew members and injuring many more. I'm here today to tell my story not only about the disaster of April 20, 2010, but also about the events that led to that disaster. It is my hope that armed with this information, this Committee and this country can prevent another tragedy like this one from ever happening again.

Like many people, I have been following the congressional testimony of the executives from Transocean, BP, and Halliburton, and I have watched their endless finger-pointing blaming each other for the blowout of the well. In fact, this event was set in motion years ago by these companies needlessly rushing to make money faster, while cutting corners to save money. When these companies put their savings over our safety, they gambled with our lives. They gambled with *my* life. They gambled with the lives of 11 of my crew members who will never see their families or loved ones again.

The blowout of this well was hardly the first thing to go wrong. I was working up on deck, helping to pump drilling mud down into the wellbore hole. However, we kept losing drilling mud, either because the underground formation was unstable, or because drilling too quickly caused the formation to crack. Either way, about 4 separate times in the space of 20 days, we had to stop pumping drilling mud and pump down a heavy-duty sealant compound instead, to seal the cracks in the formation that were causing us to lose mud.

On the night of April 20, 2010, I was asleep in my cabin, two decks below the surface deck, of the *Deepwater Horizon*. At about 10:00, I woke up to the sound of an explosion. I didn't know what the sound was, so I waited for a few seconds to see what was happening. Another explosion went off - the force of it ripped through my body and collapsed the upper decks of the rig. Someone had opened the door to my cabin, and people were running up and down the halls, screaming that we had to get out. I ran through the door of my cabin and towards the stairwell to the lifeboat deck, but it had collapsed. I ran back to my room to get my life jacket, my shoes, and my wedding ring. I then followed my crane operator, Eugene Moss, who was running another way, to the other end of the living quarters and used another stairwell. Once on that deck, one deck below the surface, we ran through more living quarters to get to the lifeboat deck. The ceiling above the lifeboat deck had collapsed by the galley. The air was smoky and gritty with debris. Eugene and I picked our way through the rubble to the lifeboat deck outside.

Once we were outside, I turned and looked at the derrick, which was completely engulfed in flames so bright, it seemed like daytime. I remember seeing people just staring at the flames. Someone was trying to "muster," which means to get everyone assembled, and to get a headcount. Some people were getting into the lifeboats. And some people were in such shock that they just stood there, staring, unable to move.

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Suddenly, the flames on the derrick intensified, and that was when people started to panic and scramble for the lifeboats. I got into Lifeboat Number 2, strapped myself in, and waited for what seemed like hours. Some people were getting back out of the lifeboat, and another person was still trying to “muster” and get a headcount. I was certain I was going to die, so I just sat there and waited for something to happen - for the derrick to fall down and take out the lifeboat, maybe.

Finally, as the lifeboat filled up with smoke, someone made the call to lower our boat into the water. We unlatched from the rig’s cables and motored toward the *Damon B. Bankston*, a nearby supply vessel. The rig medic there tended to the injured until the Coast Guard arrived, about 30 minutes later. The Coast Guard retrieved the injured from the boat by helicopter, which took them about two hours, until about 12:30 a.m. At 8:00 a.m., the *Damon B. Bankston* was finally released to start heading back to land.

Four hours later, and 14 hours after the explosion, we pulled up to a platform full of Coast Guard investigators at about noon on April 21. We were told we had to give a written statement before we could leave the boat. After that was done, we pulled up to another platform to pick up some paramedics to ride back to land with us.

At 1:30 a.m., 28 hours after the explosion, we finally made it back to land. However, before we were allowed to leave, we were lined up and made to take a drug test. It was only then, 28 hours after the explosion, that I was given access to a phone, and was allowed to call my wife and tell her I was okay. At last, they arranged to have us all driven to the Crowne Plaza Hotel in New Orleans where our families were waiting. Another three hours later, we finally made it to the hotel and to our families. 31 hours after the explosion, at 5:00 a.m. on April 22, I was given a hotel room and allowed to rest.

I was lucky enough to not suffer any injury that required paramedic treatment, but to say that I was not injured isn’t true, either. I breathed in lots of thick, dark smoke from the fire and the explosion, and will need to see a doctor for smoke inhalation. Like many other crew members, I am suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and have had trouble sleeping, memory loss, nightmares, and flashbacks to the explosion. Since the explosion, I have also developed a nervous twitch in my eye, and my doctor said this was probably caused by stress, too. A Transocean representative even asked me to sign a document stating I was not injured in order to get \$5000 for the loss of my personal possessions in general. This happened 10 days after the explosion, in a Denny’s restaurant without my lawyer present. I wouldn’t sign the part saying I had “suffered no injury.”

I decided to hire my current attorney, Brent Coon, because of his firm’s experience handling the 2005 BP refinery explosion in Texas. It was sad to learn after the fact about BP’s shockingly bad safety record in North America. Also, I never would have expected for my company, Transocean, to treat me like a criminal after I had survived such a disaster by making me submit to a drug test, and then try to tempt or trick me into giving up my legal rights by signing forms without a lawyer present. If I had known any of these things, I might have thought

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twice before setting foot on the *Deepwater Horizon*.

Members of the Committee, you cannot allow BP and Transocean to continue to conduct business this way. I hope that my testimony here today leads to changes that make drilling rigs safer places to work, so that a tragedy like this never happens again. Thank you.